

games™



G R E A T E S T



GAMES
OF ALL TIME



games™

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SUPER MARIO WORLD

★ UNLIKE CINEMA AND literature, a lot of videogame history is unlikely to hold up as we move forward. Retro holds its own nostalgic appeal, but such a technology-led art form has a tendency to leave the past behind; something to take lessons from, but not necessarily to enjoy. *Super Mario World*, though, is different, because *Super Mario World* will never die.

It's easy to take a game like this for granted. The older *Mario* games had shown how much fun it was to make a little plumber jump, and in many ways *Super Mario World* is just that made 16-bit. That's the beauty of Nintendo at the peak of its powers; it masks the brilliance of its design to the point where you don't even get the chance to analyse it. The grin-inducing flow of *Mario World's* faster levels is almost transcendental

— no time is spent thinking, contemplating. In Mario's World, you simply 'are'.

The amount of ideas just bubbling under *Super Mario World's* primary-coloured crust is ridiculous. It wins the award for using one of the first hub worlds, with branching paths, hidden levels and even a separate way to complete the game. Every single one of its 96 routes features the type of inspiration that most whole games can't even muster, and yet it never feels the need to shout about them. Much like *Super Mario Galaxy 2*, in fact. It just blows your mind, jumps down a pipe and never mentions it again.

/// Playing today feels as fresh as ever. Actually, it feels better, because you're afforded the time to cast a critical eye over its magic. The

intricacy of the design is amazing: every inch microscopically placed to maximise the potential for speed in the hands of a good player or trickiness for a novice, and, while it may frustrate, it's never unfair.

Perhaps the most overlooked treasure in *Super Mario World's* overflowing chest, though, is its humour. Nintendo is often likened to Pixar, and every one of its *Mario* games is often laugh-out-loud funny. Just watch how the goombas walk, or listen to the noise when Mario inflates into a balloon. You can't fluke that kind of likeability. You can't fluke something like *Super Mario World*, either. Love it or loathe it, Nintendo has shaped modern culture more than any other videogame company. This might just be Nintendo's finest hour.



HITMAN 2: SILENT ASSASSIN

★ FOR ALL THE camaraderie it shared with the sudden explosion of stealth-action games in the first decade of the 21st century, *Hitman 2* was actually a nefarious little puzzle game at heart. Beneath the bleak pseudo-psychological musings and occasional shootouts, it was basically all about finding the right fit for every little piece in the bloody jigsaw that was each mission. And, like all great puzzle games, it allowed for multiple approaches, but with all of them snapping together just so, provided you'd figured out the magic steps leading up to each perfect kill. It's in this bizarre gameplay quirk that *Hitman 2* stood alone in a very crowded genre, and it's the reason why the *Hitman* series is arguably the best of its kind.



★ BLOODBORNE

THE MIYAZAKI FORMULA has been well established through the *Dark Souls* games, so it was refreshing to discover that a new setting and a few tweaks to mechanics would make *Bloodborne* an even stronger experience. There was an immediacy to this PS4 exclusive that took the game up a level. A truly superb experience.



★ HOTLINE MIAMI

A PERFECT MIX of message and mayhem, *Hotline Miami*'s graphic violence set against the backdrop of a violent movie set means it gets away with a lot more than many 3D games might be able to. More importantly though it's also a great example of addictive trial-and-error gaming.



★ LEFT 4 DEAD

THE KEY TO *Left 4 Dead*'s perfection was its simplicity. Four survivors of equal skill and abilities taking on wave after wave of undead, monitored by an AI director that made every new playthrough feel fresh. As co-op experiences go, this is as balanced as it gets, and began more water-cooler conversations than we can count.



GRAND THEFT AUTO III

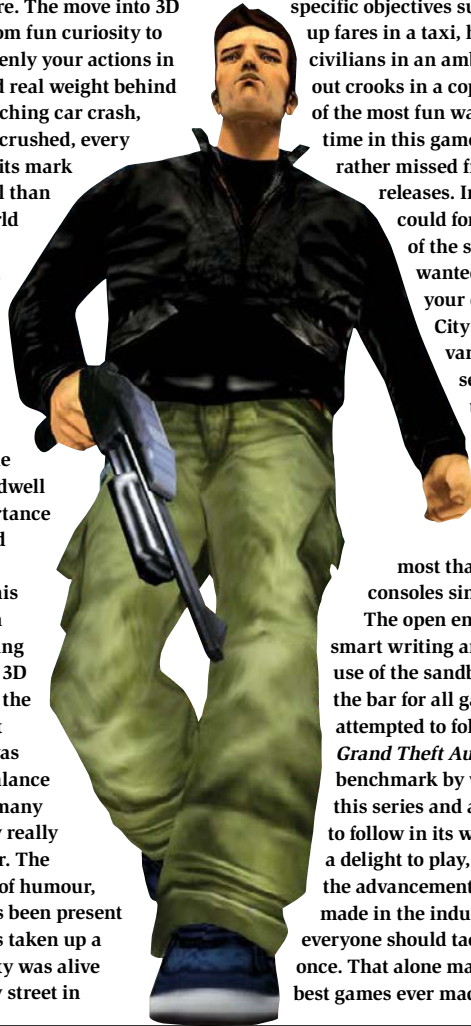
★ THERE ARE ONLY a handful of games, even in this collection, that could be considered truly industry-changing as well as great, but *Grand Theft Auto III* is one of them. As an open world sandbox experience it was a leap forward from anything we had experienced before. The move into 3D took the series from fun curiosity to epic drama. Suddenly your actions in this world carried real weight behind them. Every crunching car crash, every pedestrian crushed, every bullet that found its mark was more visceral than ever. And the world stood still for a moment and took notice.

The modern era of action games would frankly be nothing without *GTA III* to pave the way, but let's not dwell too long on importance and influence and reflect instead on the elements of this game that remain superb. Considering it was pioneering 3D sandbox gaming, the balance of on-foot and car control was excellent. It's a balance of handling that many games even today really struggle to master. The subversive sense of humour, which had always been present in this series, was taken up a notch. And the city was alive with detail. Every street in

Liberty City had something to offer and some small spark of inspiration behind it. This was New York through an action-cinema lens and it looked amazing.

In many ways the side missions available in this *Grand Theft Auto* are the best the series has ever offered. Vehicle-specific objectives such as picking up fares in a taxi, helping injured civilians in an ambulance or taking out crooks in a cop car are some of the most fun ways to pass your time in this game, and are frankly rather missed from more recent releases. In theory, you could forego the entirety of the story if you wanted and just spend your days in Liberty City role-playing as various emergency services and transport providers. There was more freedom in this city than you might find in most that have graced our consoles since.

The open ended gameplay, smart writing and imaginative use of the sandbox space has set the bar for all games that have attempted to follow in this genre. *Grand Theft Auto III* is still the benchmark by which we judge this series and any that attempt to follow in its wake. It remains a delight to play, even with all the advancements that have been made in the industry and frankly everyone should tackle it at least once. That alone makes it one of the best games ever made.





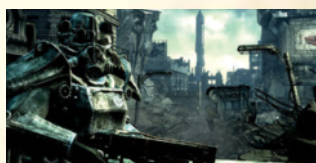
FALLOUT 3



YOU PUSH THE button.

Hundreds of lives vaporise in an instant, the vast, mushrooming cloud dissipating into the irradiated fog of the Capital Wasteland. The moment you step from Vault 101 and drink in that endless barren landscape, *Fallout 3* seems rich with possibilities; under the gaze of Alistair Tenpenny, you reduce them

to dust and ash. Role-playing games are built around conventional ideas of good and evil, but Bethesda doesn't let us off the hook so easily. You may have obliterated Megaton, but in doing so you have forged a new destiny. Even the most depraved choices reap seductive rewards. In *Fallout 3*, there is no such thing as a destructive act.



DEVIL MAY CRY 3: DANTE'S AWAKENING



★ AFTER THE SUCCESS of the first game and the woeful disaster of the second, the fledgling *Devil May Cry* series found itself at a well-trodden juncture; either recapture the spirit of the original or instead burn away like so many before it. Thankfully, Capcom managed the former, with a prequel that not only

reinvigorated the series' demonic image, but also surpassed the hack-and-slash action of the original. This was partly achieved with the new style system, but, while the player took control of a younger and more rebellious Dante, it was the dysfunctional relation with callous brother Vergil which set *Awakening* apart.

“A prequel that not only reinvigorated the series' demonic image, but also surpassed the hack-and-slash action of the original”

JOURNEY

★ IT STARTED AS an exploration of isolation and discovery. Transplanting the experience of an astronaut floating in space to a desert with no language and no communication. And then it turned into something else. It became one of the most exhilarating and affirming gaming experiences in decades. Thatgamecompany's *Journey* is oddly intimate for its wide expanses of featureless sand. The emotional highs and lows as

you struggle up a mountain for unknown reasons, discovering the ruins of a lost civilisation, bumping into fellow travellers who come and go as you trek are quite breathtaking at times. And it's all about self-discovery. There are no instructions and no overt guides. In fact your best chance for assistance is bumping into another player who may have played through the game before. For a game that lasts only a couple of hours to complete, it will live with you for years.



HEAVY RAIN

★ ETHAN MARS STANDS in the apartment of a notorious drug dealer. The criminal in question, wearing only a dressing gown and underwear, cowers under the aim of a handgun. “Please, please don't kill me, man. I got children,” he pleads, brandishing a photo of young Sarah and Sindy.

If Mars kills the man, two innocent children are left fatherless. If he doesn't, Mars' own son will drown. Time is ticking, and the decision is left in the player's hands. Questions race through the mind – how do you quantify one life over the other? Do the ends really justify the means? Your finger hovers uncertainly over the trigger.

In *Heavy Rain*, bullets don't just remove obstacles, they change lives. It's a game that demands you *think* before you pull the trigger. What other game has truly achieved such a feat? With *Heavy Rain*, David Cage has shown us the first tentative glimpse of a future that's concerned not just with explosions and spacecraft, but also with the provocative intricacies of the human condition.



★ WORMS

PURE, MIRTHFUL ANARCHY – that’s what Andy Davidson brought to the Amiga with *Worms*. No game before it had afforded players such a breadth of options for annihilating their opponents in a competitive game, and, combined with randomly generated levels that could be reduced to physics-challenged floating debris, demanded such environmental awareness, constant tactical assessment and keen platforming skills. The unparalleled joy and frustration of four-player *Worms* – complete with self-named teams of invertebrates – defined the 16-bit home computer era, and left a legacy that the series still manages to live up to, 13 years and ten games later.



★ OUTRUN 2

THE ORIGINAL *OUTRUN* is a game more fondly remembered for its music and graphics (in that order) than its gameplay, which if we’re honest is actually pretty mediocre. However, the misleadingly titled 2003 sequel (it ought strictly to be called *OutRun 8*, or *OutRun 4* if you stick solely to coin-ops) delivers aesthetics every bit as dazzling, but this time married to a truly wonderful slide-happy racing game that plays out like a cartoon *Ridge Racer*. The greatly expanded home versions are even better, and include the original game so you can see just how far we’ve come.



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

★ IF YOU’RE A gamer of a certain age – say late-twenties or older – then the phrase ‘up, down, left, right, A, Start’ should be hitting all your nostalgic erogenous zones in just the right order. That’s because this easy-to-remember sequence was the level-select code for *Sonic The Hedgehog*, a game that

introduced Mega Drive owners to the thrill of turbo-charged platforming. Going back, it’s hard to pinpoint exactly what made the hedgehog with attitude’s first adventure so thrilling, but as a combination of accomplished level design, vibrant visuals, intuitive controls and an infectious soundtrack by Masato

Nakamura, history will attest that, at his peak, the needle-mouse was on an even footing with the plumber. However, although some will argue Sonic reached terminal velocity in his second outing, in terms of where the speed of sound was broken, we heard the sonic boom a few beats into the Green Hill Zone.



DOOM

★ IT’S INTERESTING TO note that despite its vintage, *Doom*, the FPS prime mover, is probably a lot more open-ended than many shooters these days. Levels weren’t planned out as simple corridors, you could exploit monster AI and get them to kill each other, and while your goals basically boiled down to ‘kill all monsters’ and ‘get all the keycards’, you were always given a fairly diverse arsenal with which to approach each encounter, and you were never hamstrung by scripted sequences. But that’s not why

you’re really here, is it? No, you want to know why *Doom* rules the Nineties, why it made John Romero a superstar, why it led to the PC becoming the gaming platform-du-jour for a while there, and why it’s still so inexplicably compelling after all these years. The best answer? It’s a game unburdened by commercial expectations or responsibilities; it’s unmitigated innovation and ambition – a technological milestone and a masterpiece in simple, effective game design. Oh, and Cyberdemons.

★ FEZ

WITH A CENTRAL conceit of rotating a 2D world to reveal the hidden depths behind it and manipulating the way you can traverse the environment as a result, *Fez* was one of the most ingenious puzzle platformers to have been released in years. The incredible level design, taxing challenges and amazing attention to detail packed it with delights and hair-pulling gameplay.



★ STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

QUITE POSSIBLY THE greatest *Star Wars* game ever made, BioWare's venture even longer ago in a galaxy far, far away gave us the kind of deep, rich and intoxicating look at the wider universe of Lucas' creation we had always wanted to see. It also helped to establish what we would consider to be the BioWare formula for RPGs: great, charismatic supporting characters, player choice, and a fairly binary good or evil moral compass for your protagonist. It remains one of the best stories set in this universe and a benchmark for all of BioWare's later games.



★ SPELUNKY

HELPING TO RE-ESTABLISH the roguelike in the modern era, *Spelunky* was a small revelation on release and thanks to its procedurally-generated levels and perfectly blended game mechanics it remains as refreshing to play now as it did on day one. With a single life and only survival on your mind, it's a simple and essential gaming experience.



★ **GRAND THEFT AUTO** might take credit for inventing sandbox gaming but, in reality, it was Braben and Bell's 1984 space trading opus that first brought the potential of open-world games to the fore. Freeform structure, three-dimensional visuals and an ingenious method for squeezing data on thousands of planets into little memory, made *Elite* a title years, arguably even decades, ahead of its time. Its influence is inescapable, with games like *EVE Online* and Egosoft's *X* series continuing the legacy of the BBC classic, and *Elite*'s perfect use of smoke and mirrors to present a convincing universe represents immersion developers still struggle to achieve.

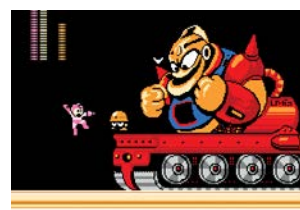
“It is great to hear that *Elite*, nearly 26 years on, is still in the top 100. How many of today's games will be in there in the year 2036? I would have been delighted to know it back in 1984, and of course I am delighted today”

David Braben Co-creator, *Elite*



PIKMIN 2

★ **FOR ALL ITS** inventiveness, the original *Pikmin* was something of a flawed gem, never really living up to its huge potential. Miyamoto got everything right for the follow-up though – more so if you've played the superior Wii version – and delivered a sequel that effortlessly married hardcore strategy to Nintendo's typical family approach. While gameplay improvements like the loss of the original's timer, the introduction of a second player, several new *Pikmin* and the ability to explore dangerous caves add greatly to *Pikmin 2*'s appeal, it's the sheer craftsmanship of the stage design that makes it such a joy to constantly return to.



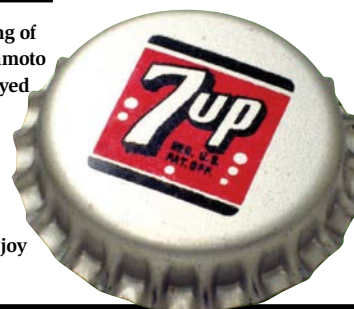
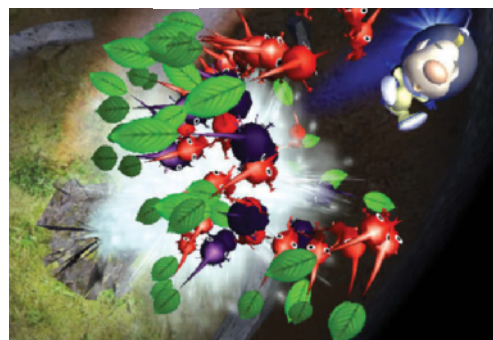
★ MEGA MAN 2

CAPCOM'S ACTION PLATFORMER earned its reputation quickly for being tough as nails and this was the best example of it. With eight bosses to take on in any order you wished, earning new power ups as you went, *Mega Man 2* was a major leap up for the fledgling series.



★ GRAN TURISMO

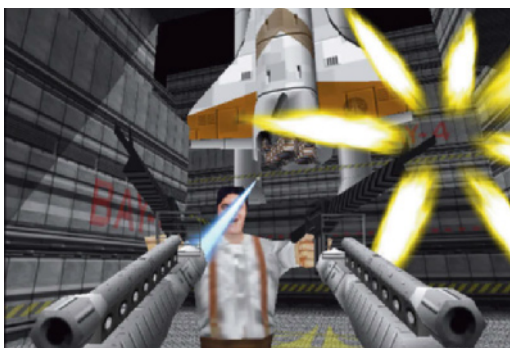
THE EVOLUTION OF PlayStation's premier racing simulation series has been something to behold, as it pushes hardware with each and every release, but it was this original game that established our love of the title. Perfect driving mechanics, tense racing and wonderful visuals.





★ SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL

BRAWL DESERVES ITS place on this list for the soundtrack alone. The greatest collaboration of composers ever seen in the medium, it unites virtually every big name in the business as they each set about re-arranging the soundtrack to our youth. What better way to score the biggest and best clash of videogame heroes we're ever likely to see?



★ GOLDENEYE 007

IN THE MINEFIELD of blockbuster-to-console tie-ins, it's hard to think of any game that has successfully surpassed the legacy of its inspiration, but if there's one instance that at least deserves consideration it's Rare's seminal *GoldenEye*. This game defined the console FPS by crafting an experience that went beyond pulling the trigger.



★ VIRTUA FIGHTER

AS THE FIRST arcade fighter to feature 3D polygon graphics, *Virtua Fighter* was a revolutionary game, but it was also a precision brawler that stands up well to modern standards. Even its use of camera, adjusting to fighter positions in a 3D space, was quite revolutionary. It was a massive step for the genre and a great example of what could be achieved.

CHRONO TRIGGER

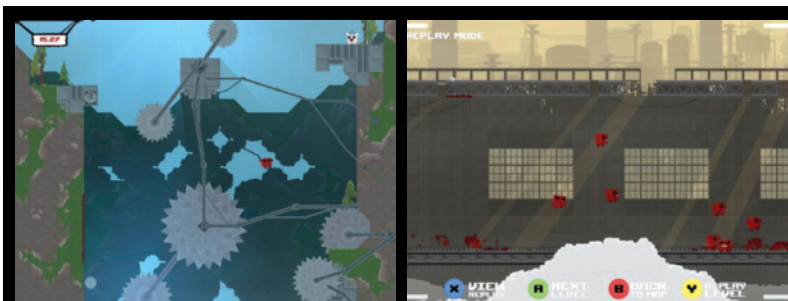


★ STILL CONSIDERED TO be one of the greatest Japanese RPGs ever made, *Chrono Trigger* was a distillation of some of the best talent in the business at the time. With Hironobu Sakaguchi, the creator of *Final Fantasy*, at the helm with support from *Dragon Quest* creator Yuji Horii and *Dragon Ball* artist Akira

Toriyama in support, it was a game that had all the makings of a classic. It became much more than the sum of its parts.

Its time jumping story that had silent hero Crono build a team of supporting character from throughout history is as beguiling as it ever was and can now be enjoyed on multiple platforms.

“With Hironobu Sakaguchi, the creator of *Final Fantasy*, at the helm with support from *Dragon Quest* creator Yuji Horii and *Dragon Ball* artist Akira Toriyama in support, it was a game that had all the makings of a classic”



SUPER MEAT BOY

★ FOLLOWING IN THE footsteps of precision platformers like *N+*, *Super Meat Boy* added some flair and gore to its leaping and death-defying mechanics that instantly captured the hearts of all who played it. *Super Meat Boy* is incredibly demanding, asking you to risk life and meaty limb with each and every press of the jump button, but it's all the more satisfying because of that. And then you get the humour, taking pot shots at gaming history and other indie titles as the cherry on a gruesome and thoroughly enjoyable cake that is devilishly difficult to put down once you start playing. It's the new standard for hardcore platforming games.



MASS EFFECT 2



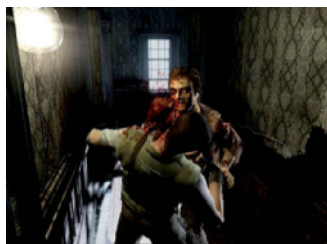
ROLE-PLAYING GAMES are still influenced by a time when they were played with dice, when the experience was defined by what you carried and the number you rolled. *Mass Effect 2* departed from this paradigm, and moved towards a truer form of role-playing, one built around moment-to-moment choices with unknowable repercussions, where you could inhabit your character and own their fate more completely than ever before. The characters, writing and art direction are also to its credit, of course, but BioWare's highest achievement was to make blockbuster RPGs like *Final Fantasy XIII* and its own *Dragon Age: Origins* seem like relics from a bygone era.



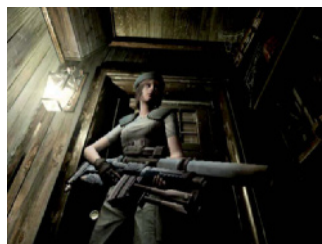
★ BIOSHOCK

FOR EVERY DESIGNER interested in telling stories through interactivity, the bleeding edge of what is being said and done lies in developing ways of uniting narrative and gameplay into one harmonious package. Even so many years later, *BioShock* is still as close as the commercial industry has come to achieving this goal, presenting a beautifully realised world where the player's actions not only make sense, but also add depth to their appreciation of its underlying fiction. The future *BioShock* pointed towards was to be a richer and more satisfying one and much of that promise has been fulfilled by titles since, but it is a seminal moment on our path to reaching those heights. Many may believe gaming is a medium in its infancy, but *BioShock* proves otherwise. Gaming has grown up.

RESIDENT EVIL

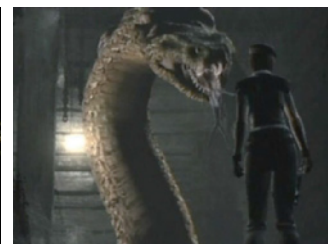


★ INTENTIONALLY OR OTHERWISE (probably that one), *Resident Evil* is still one of the funniest games ever made. Gems like the Jill sandwich line, Barry's revelation that a grenade launcher is 'especially effective against living things' and evergreen quotable references to Chris's blood and the master of unlocking are all gifts that keep on giving – even the GameCube



remake seemed to miss the point of the gloriously hammy performances, instead falling somewhere between the original's campy action and an attempt at 'proper' acting.

While the tank controls make it frustrating to go back to today, this natural evolution of what *Alone In The Dark* had started several years earlier takes full credit for inventing the survival-horror



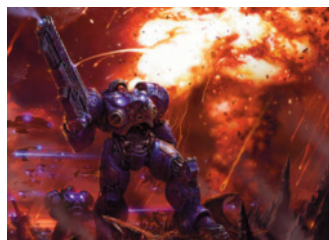
genre as we now know it. Then-cutting-edge tech gave players a genuinely affecting horror experience that helped make PlayStation a household name – and gave it its first taste of in-game censorship – and the universe created for this schlocky take on classic zombie flicks is still going strong, expanded massively with spin-offs and even movies. Bad, bad movies.

LEMMINGS



★ A TRUE PUZZLE GAME (despite very minor action elements), *Lemmings* represents a genre that contains some of the finest games of all time, yet which is almost completely overlooked by the gaming media and gamers alike. Titles like *Slitherlink*, *Pic-Pic* and *Picross 3D* (all DS), *Gem'X* (Amiga), *Polarium* and *Guru Logic Champ* (GBA) each contain hundreds of hours of utterly absorbing play, outlasting a dozen triple-A blockbusters, yet you'll struggle to find a word printed about them.

Lemmings was arguably the first and last one to achieve widespread fame and recognition, and it's telling that it's still being ported to platforms like the PSP 20 years later. The cute characters help, as does the (largely-illusory) sense of a sandbox world of multiple solutions, but plenty of subsequent puzzlers had those same features without succeeding. It's just one of those weird *Sliding Doors* moments where gaming culture picked a certain direction at a crossroads, and never looked back.



STARCRAFT

★ REMAKES HAVE A way of messing things up. If you recognise the phrase 'Not the bees!', you will be painfully aware of this. When Blizzard more or less invented the modern RTS formula

with *Warcraft II*, repainting the whole thing in steel blues and greys seemed unnecessary and dangerous. But it worked: *StarCraft*, with its perfect race and unit balancing, magnificent storyline

(and visual accoutrements, like those magnificent cutscenes), immediately made it an international hit. A decade on, it's now practically South Korea's national sport.

★ CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

CALL OF DUTY 4 succeeds so well because it takes the explosive setpieces of its trigger-happy forebears and intersperses them with moments of quiet awe and solemnity. Consider the nuclear blast and Paul Jackson's final steps; 'That's a kill' uttered over the radio during the AC-130 mission; the entirety of *Ghillies In The Mist*. It's an expertly conceived single-player experience, one that Infinity Ward tried, and failed, to replicate in its sequel.



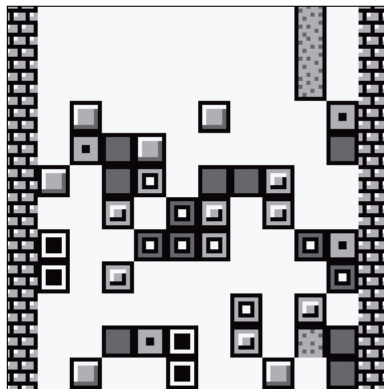
GRAND THEFT AUTO V

★ ROCKSTAR NORTH JUST knows how to get it done. *GTA V* is a perfect distillation of the gameplay mechanics and sandbox experience that was started with *GTA III*. The new twist of three simultaneous lead characters was a masterstroke that gave new life to the narrative possibilities of the game and helped keep things fresh.

In terms of mechanics and moment-to-moment gameplay, *GTA V* easily has the strongest shooting and driving control of franchise and is packed full of destructive possibilities with its wide array of weapons and drivable vehicles. And as time has gone by, the game has only improved. *GTA Online* is an incredible multiplayer sandbox, packed with so much content thanks to community game-building tools. And then the new-gen versions added even more gameplay options.

TETRIS

★ CONSIDER FOR A moment that *Tetris* is much more than a 'puzzle game'. It's a pure arcade action game with abstract graphics, requiring fast coordination and threat prioritisation rather than careful thinking – those are deadly timer-fused bombs falling from the sky, not bits of jigsaw puzzle. But the Game Boy version's 25-line 'shuttle launcher' mode was a pioneer in the field of quick-blast gaming at a time when games were becoming more overblown, and is the grandfather of the entire 'casual' scene. Puzzle game doesn't even cover it.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME

★ FREQUENTLY THE TOP of many a personal top ten, words can only do so much to convey the magnificence of *Ocarina*. Indeed, before 1998 it seemed like *A Link To The Past* would be impossible to follow, but, just like Mario before him, Link made the 3D transition as only Nintendo could facilitate. From Z-targeting and the tribulations of the Water Temple to fishing for Hylian Loach and trading up from a Pocket Egg to Big Goron's Sword, everything about *Ocarina* was pure enchantment, and as arguably the best game in this superlative series, many would say *Ocarina* is the greatest game of them all.

★ TOMB RAIDER

THE VIDEOGAME INDUSTRY is in debt to Lara Croft, the character that broke out into pop culture like few before her. But there's more to it than that – *Tomb Raider* took the third dimension *Mario 64* had recently introduced and put an action-adventure spin on it, paving the way for *Uncharted*, *Infamous*, *Assassin's Creed* and everything in-between – including a ring road in Derby. Thanks, Lara.



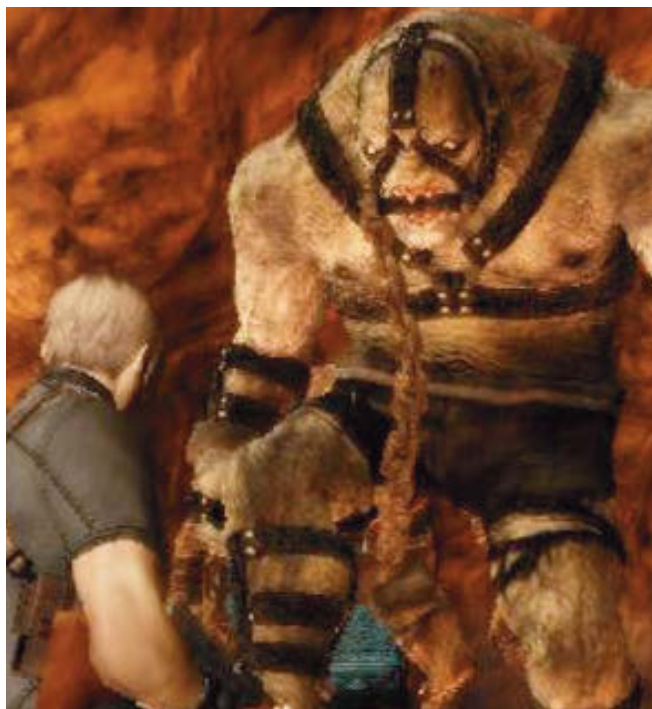
★ BAYONETTA

THIS WAS SEEN as a stop-gap until Capcom brought Dante back, but Platinum's queen of the beat-'em-all snatched the throne away and resides there still. And her reign is well deserved, with the over-the-top action of *Bayonetta*'s eponymous debut striking just the right blend of letting newcomers in and offering unprecedented combo potential for those with a mind geared towards the more technical side of gaming. It's part celebration of all things Sega, part near-perfect action game, and, while it's the former element that helped hook us in, it's the latter that keeps us going back, even though we've amassed more halos than Microsoft has sold.



★ SUPER BOMBERMAN

IT MAY HAVE taken a full decade from the character's introduction but, with 1993's *Super Bomberman*, Hudson finally embraced and embellished upon the franchise's defining quality – multiplayer. It's no coincidence that the game launched in tandem with the SNES MultiTap, and, by introducing a bunch of natty new power-ups, *Super Bomberman*'s tight and perfectly balanced four-person multiplayer mode set the standard by which the series would be judged. Later titles added gimmicks such as creatures to ride and broken auto-win power-ups, but it's the purity of a reduced item set that makes a classic *Bomberman* battle such a perfect test of player skill and high-pressure composure.



RESIDENT EVIL 4

★ HAVING DEFINED THE survival-horror genre some nine years previous, Capcom finally decided that it had pumped out enough templated sequels and, with the sixth proper entry into the series, a genre was utterly redefined overnight. A newfound emphasis on action and escaping from armies of they're-not-zombies-honests replaced the tension and lone shamblers of earlier games, and it's almost universally accepted as one of the smartest moves Capcom has ever made. It has since found a new home on Wii, where perfectly implemented motion control makes it the definitive version by no small margin.

This bona fide classic even brought the usually reserved *games™* team to blows as the argument about whether it should be the third game to receive a ten raged for weeks – it was eventually awarded a nine in issue 29, though we'd struggle to name a game that has fallen closer to top honours. It was entirely Ashley's fault, in case you were still wondering.



STREET FIGHTER III 3RD STRIKE



★ THERE WAS ALWAYS going to be at least one *Street Fighter* game making its way onto this list, and arguments over which it should be have only just started to subside. Some argued for *SSFIV*, a few more nostalgic folk pushed for *II*, but this just edged

out both. *3rd Strike*'s mixture of a fresh-faced cast (which saw only a handful of returning world warriors alongside a number of parallel fighters and oddities like Q and Oro) and one of the all-time great risk/reward mechanics in Parrying makes it a fan favourite, and it's still

played competitively today. Widely accepted as one of the best 2D fighters – if not *the* best – of all time, there are few games that still enjoy such a following with so many sequels on the shelves competing for attention. This remains a class above the rest.

LEGACY OF KAIN: SOUL REAVER

★ AT ITS CORE, *Soul Reaver* is one of the best action platformers around, offering tight mechanics, great hack and slash combat and a dark, moody world to lose yourself in, but that's only part of the equation. What really makes this one of the best games ever made is its story and the way it's all blended together with great cutscenes. In fact it should come as no surprise that the core creative team that oversaw this game would go on to make the *Uncharted* series, perfecting its craft along the way. Meanwhile, this gothic tale of betrayal, revenge and the toppling of a vampiric empire that threatens the balance of nature was utterly compelling. *Soul Reaver* was a landmark release for the age and remains a great game.



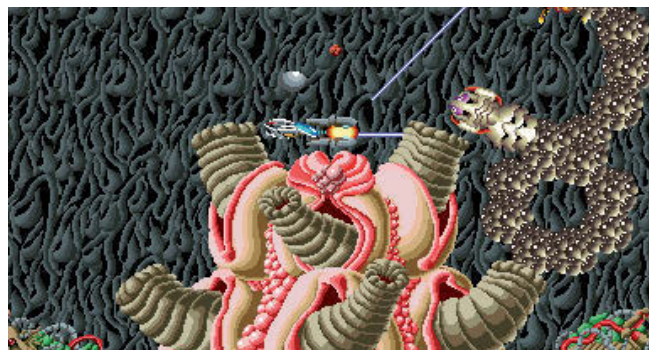
IKARUGA

★ THE SHOOT-'EM-UP genre remains a largely niche interest in the industry at the moment, but *Ikaruga* is perhaps the one that transcends tastes in game style as something truly ingenious and creative. The bullet hell on screen is made mildly more survivable by a black and white switching mechanic that means you become invulnerable to attacks



matching the colour of your ship and cause more damage to enemies of the opposite colour. It then becomes a case of dodging and flipping colours, inflicting as much destruction as you can on the way. Tense, twitch gaming at its best.

“While it wasn’t the first scrolling shooter to feature power-ups, never have they been as integral to the gameplay as they were in Irem’s iconic blaster”

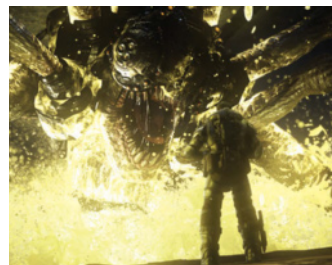
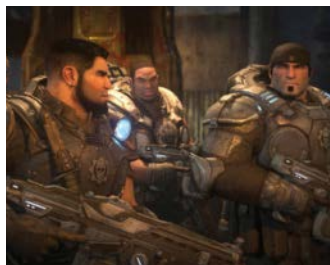


R-TYPE

★ IN THE YEARS since its inception, few scrolling shoot-'em-ups have come anywhere close to matching the magnificence of Irem’s *R-Type*. While it wasn’t the first scrolling shooter to feature power-ups, never have they been as integral to the gameplay as they were in Irem’s iconic blaster. Endlessly copied thanks to its biomechanical, Giger-esque enemies, terrifying bosses and innovative ‘Force’ power-up, and filled with challenging level design, *R-Type* was full of iconic encounters that still manage to impress. It’s somewhat telling that, after ten sequels and spin-offs, Irem has never bettered it.

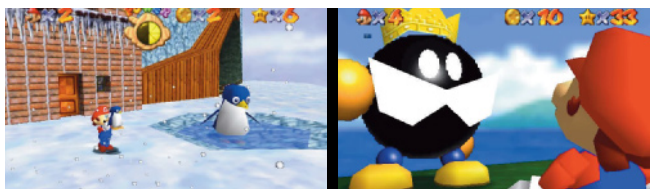
GEARS OF WAR

★ HAILED AS THE game that kickstarted a generational leap and established the Unreal Engine 3 as the go-to tech for all action games (and a few other genres along the way), *Gears Of War* was groundbreaking. It helped to popularise and perfect third-person cover shooter gameplay, now almost essential in all games using such camera controls, and its action setpieces remain some of the best in recent memory. Active reload, roadie running, the Hammer of Dawn... And then online, it just got better with great weapon balancing.



“[It’s] the kind of game that has you so close to the enemy that you can stick a grenade on their head or bury a chainsaw in them. We didn’t want to make a game where you’re shooting at a tiny guy on the horizon. If you have to use a sniper rifle just to play you might want to think about your scale”

Cliff Bleszinski Lead designer, Gears Of War



SUPER MARIO 64

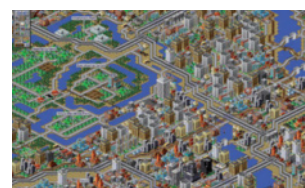
★ THE FIRST TRULY open-world game? It was certainly the first one to hit the mainstream. So much has been written about *Mario 64*’s influence that it’s hard to add anything new, so let’s just celebrate its near-flawless brilliance with a few memories to get that nostalgia flowing. The monkey that steals Mario’s cap. The giant sea monster. The corridor that never ends. Wall jumping in the castle. Wasting hours beating your best time on Peach’s secret slide. All of Tiny-Huge Island. *Mario 64* changed gaming forever in many ways, but it’s the little things that are the most fun to remember. Wa-hoo!

GOD OF WAR II

★ RELENTLESS. THERE’S NO better way of describing *God Of War II*. Any game that begins with a citywide battle with the Colossus of Rhodes and then continues to get more exciting has to be doing something right. *God Of War II* sees Sony Santa Monica at the peak of its powers, combining big-budget values with incredible vision. There’s literally never a dull moment, and every time you think it might have run out of steam, *God Of War II* throws something amazing at you, until its dizzying, parallel-universe jumping conclusion. The high point of an incredible series.


SIM CITY 2000

★ IF *SIM CITY* was the game that catapulted Will Wright out of the helicopter sim doldrums into international success, then *Sim City 2000* cemented him as a legend. Visually arresting, deep, and addictive in a way a game about placing hydroelectric dams really shouldn’t be, it’s still probably the best title in the *Sim City* series (perhaps the *Sim* series as a whole).



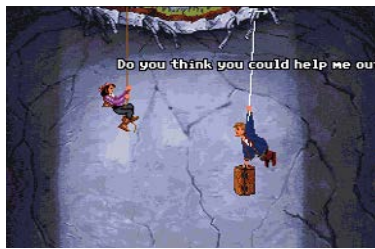


WORLD OF WARCRAFT

 GAMERS WERE EXPECTING great things from *World Of Warcraft*. After all, this was from the studio that had crafted a generic fantasy world of orcs and dwarves into one of gaming's most respected real-time strategy games. Despite the expectations, no one, not even Blizzard, could have predicted just how defining *World Of Warcraft* would eventually become. And to simply argue that *World Of Warcraft* was in the right place at the right time is sheer folly; *World Of Warcraft* has become a phenomenon due to Blizzard nailing virtually everything from its very inception. More importantly, however, the developer realises it would be nothing without its 11 million-plus fan base and, as a result, it responds to feedback with a speed that few other developers can even manage. The end result is a title that constantly evolves to suit the player's ever changing requirements. *WOW*. That just about sums it up, we like to think.



MONKEY ISLAND 2: LECHUCK'S REVENGE



★ WHAT IS IT that makes the difference between a point-and-click classic that transcends generations and one that demonstrates why the ageing genre may no longer be relevant? For many it's the quality of the puzzles, their ability to boggle the mind without scrambling it. *Monkey Island 2*, like nearly every other LucasArts classic, certainly has those. But it has something else too, something that elevates it above every peer: Guybrush Threepwood. The biggest loser in videogames is also one of our greatest heroes. Fuelled by the sharp wit of creators Gilbert, Grossman and Schafer, he's every bit the wisecracking hero we'd all love to be while simultaneously

being a fairly clueless dope. Even after fulfilling his dream of becoming a pirate in the first game, he remains an atypically powerless protagonist, barely able to maintain a relationship with his girlfriend, let alone thwart the evil plot of zombie pirate LeChuck. And therein lies the true greatness of *Monkey Island 2*. For every clever puzzle, every rib-tickling joke, there's also a hint of dark tragedy that runs through the entire game, to its shocking, somewhat depressing conclusion. That such an ending was never truly resolved only makes *Monkey Island 2* even more fascinating, more unforgettable. It's a game that gets under the skin and stays there.

DEUS EX

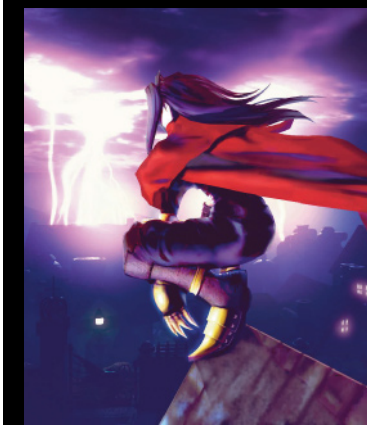


★ IT'S HARD TO explain to non-gamers why *Deus Ex* is a candidate for the greatest videogame of all time. You can point to the story, but it's basically a series of conspiranoid clichés piled on top of one another. You can point to its non-linearity, but it seems so insignificant compared to the open-world shenanigans on offer from Bethesda Softworks. The real mastery in Warren Spector's *Deus Ex* design is the symbiotic relationship between story and gameplay: they are essentially one and the same. Where most games shove tracts of poorly planned exposition in your face in

between shooting segments, *Deus Ex* lets you play the story and explore its various alleyways and dead-ends at your leisure, and in exactly the way you want. It allows you to come up with creative – and unanticipated – solutions to the many problems you're presented with, and Spector himself remains extremely proud of the fact that *Deus Ex* players are still finding ways through the game that neither he nor his fellow team-members ever predicted or intended.

Whether you choose to lean heavily on certain augmentations, sneaking, traps, diplomacy, or countless

other means of exploring the game, *Deus Ex* allows you to do it without constraining you in any way. It's depressing that so many years since its release, not a single game has been able to match it in this regard: it remains the flagship title for choice, consequence, and hands-off game design. Worse still, it seems that, in the age of cinematic cover systems, streamlining and a drastic overemphasis on making every little nook and cranny of a game so polished and user-friendly that exploration and experimentation are basically forfeit, it's unlikely that it will ever be repeated again.





FINAL FANTASY VII

★ The series may have been popular in Japan and the US for some time beforehand, but when Europe was introduced to the *Final Fantasy* series with the unanimous praise that surrounded *VII*, it was clear that we'd been missing out. But rather than dwell on that, let's look at the bright side – the moment when Squaresoft was let loose on a disc-based platform for the first time, and the JRPG was forever changed in one fell swoop.

Going from limited cartridge space (the SNES games weigh in at around the 2MB mark) to the almost 3GB offered by the game's four discs, *FFVII* was Square's chance to push the boundaries of scale, scope and variety way beyond existing limits and the talented developer clearly jumped at the chance. The leap to 3D characters (albeit simple untextured ones that look little-to-nothing like their CG cutscene counterparts) allowed for a level of involvement and attachment that many couldn't get from the adventure's pixel-based predecessors – if the SNES games

were books that demanded imagination and suspension of disbelief then *Final Fantasy VII* was a stunningly produced movie by comparison.

Even today, *FFVII* is the yardstick by which all JRPGs are measured, and, despite the fact that the series itself has changed beyond recognition, many other developers are still playing the same sport that Square so decisively dominated over a decade ago. It was just an example of everything coming together perfectly – the something-for-everyone cast of characters, the story (which taught many that games could be genuinely touching), Uematsu's stunning soundtrack, an entire world to explore and the combat system which stood head and shoulders above most that had come before it. *FFVII* wasn't just a classic of its time – despite so much progress in the genre, it remains a superb RPG experience, and it's with good reason that many celebrate this as the finest example of the genre. Also, Aeris dies.



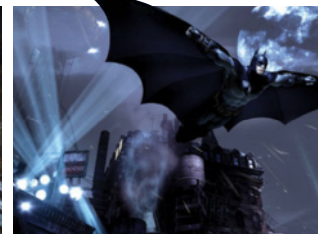
★ MAX PAYNE

REMEDY'S NOIR CLASSIC was a fantastic mix of comic violence and gut-wrenching narrative as you seek answers surrounding the murder of Payne's wife and newborn daughter. *Max Payne*'s slo-mo shooting mechanic remains one of the best examples of the form and added a neat flair touch to some pretty epic shootouts.



★ SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHI'S ISLAND

WHILE *SUPER MARIO World* ranks as one of gaming's greatest launch titles, in contrast its sequel *Yoshi's Island* rates as perhaps gaming's greatest swansong. Indeed, while many were mesmerised with the swanky new PSone, Nintendo diehards ventured on an epic pastel-coloured journey that would reveal the origins of the Mario brothers.



★ BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY

ARKHAM ASYLUM WAS a surprise package for most, who had assumed it would be another lacklustre licensed Batman experience. It was far from it. But with the greater ambition and expectation of *Arkham City* Rocksteady appeared to blossom and create an incredible mix of sandbox, narrative and superheroism. The truest Batman experience around.



★ METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

KOJIMA'S METAL GEAR Solid formula had appeared to be well established, but *MGS 3* blew it apart. The bosses were as insane, the story as meandering, but the period setting, playing as the future Big Boss and generally getting your hands very dirty indeed made it something else. It perfected the 3D stealth action that the series has continued to pursue ever since. A masterpiece of the era.



HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED

★ JUST LOOK AT that tagline: a statement of such brazen confidence it borders on pure arrogance. Forget what you know, it says – the past is prologue. From this point on, there is only one name in action videogames, and that name is *Halo*. Thank God the Bungie team's self-aggrandising prophecy actually came to pass. We doubt there are enough paper towels in the world to wipe that much egg from their faces.

In fact, it came to pass with such impressive force that it's now commonly accepted that, without *Halo*'s success, Microsoft would have quit the videogames business after a single console. As beliefs go it's spectacularly pointless, but the fact that it's impossible to prove doesn't stop it from sounding completely and utterly true. If you were old enough to be paying attention when the Xbox launched, you'll remember that

Halo was the only compelling reason to buy one, and it was so exciting, so expertly crafted, and so much damn fun in co-op that millions and millions of people did just that. *Halo* introduced the scope and visual splendour of PC gaming to consoles for the first time, shattering the boundary between the platforms so completely it could never be completely reassembled. In a very real sense, it helped drag gaming into a new era.

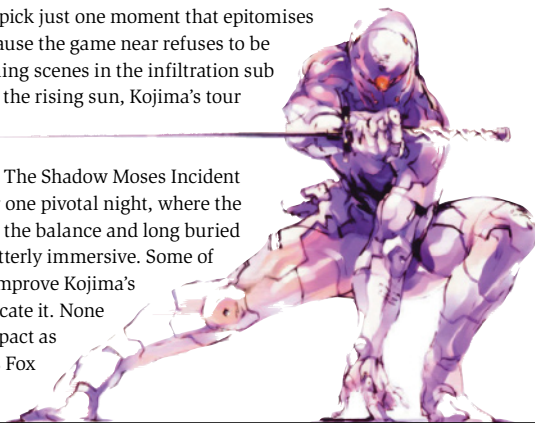
METAL GEAR SOLID



★ WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE *Metal Gear Solid* moment? Is it the shattering of the fourth-wall during the showdown with Psycho Mantis? Perhaps it's the first time you cross paths with Otacon and Grey Fox? Or Sniper Wolf's melancholic speech, delivered with

a dying breath? Could it be Snake's arduous fight against Vulcan Raven in the freezing subterranean levels of the complex, or maybe the final confrontation with Liquid atop Rex?

It's incredibly difficult to pick just one moment that epitomises *Metal Gear*'s greatness, because the game near refuses to be picked apart. From the opening scenes in the infiltration sub to that final skidoo ride into the rising sun, Kojima's tour de force takes no breaks, utilises no editing, offers no moment of respite. The Shadow Moses Incident takes place in real-time over one pivotal night, where the future of the world hangs in the balance and long buried emotions are exposed. It's utterly immersive. Some of *Metal Gear Solid*'s sequels improve Kojima's formula; others over-complicate it. None of them deliver the same impact as that fateful night in Alaska's Fox Archipelago.



RED DEAD REDEMPTION

★ **GRAND THEFT AUTO** in the wild west, right? What could be so spectacular about that? Well, rather a lot actually as while the formula of open sandbox and criminal activity may have been the starting point for Rockstar's outlaw simulator, it became a great deal more. The classic period setting allowed for a whole swathe of classic cinematic experiences to be interpreted through the Rockstar lens. The story of a bad man making amends and trying to do right by his family was classic Eastwood fair and the action suitably unique compared to the other titles in this publisher's stable.

Dead Eye Targeting was a particularly welcome addition, making horseback combat far more manageable at first and generally more enjoyable. Chasing bandits, taking out camps, heisting trains and generally bringing a capital 'W' to the wild west experience, *Red Dead* was high-octane entertainment when things kicked off. However, it was the moments in-between that really made it great.

The wide and empty expanses of the fictional southern United States and Northern portion of Mexico were filled with possibility and danger. Cantering around these regions as the sun set over them was regularly breathtaking. This was world creation on a whole new level to what we had seen from Rockstar at that point.



“The classic period setting allowed for a whole swathe of classic cinematic experiences to be interpreted through the Rockstar lens. The story of a bad man making amends and trying to do right by his family was classic Eastwood fair and the action suitably unique compared to the other titles in this publisher's stable”



PARAPPA THE RAPPER

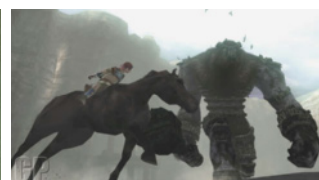
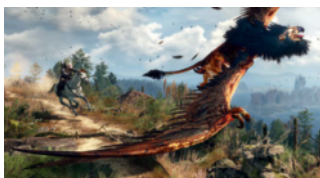
★ RELEASED IN THE same year as *Metal Slug*, the groundbreaking rhythm-action game featuring a paper-thin rapping dog has more in common with it than you might think. Well, okay, we're stretching that a bit, but its lightness of heart, bright colours and simple play mechanism (which still concealed depth and replay value) looked equally out of place in the gaming world of the time as SNK's 2D platform shooter, and went on to have an even bigger influence.

PaRappa pretty much invented the music-game genre, and while that means we have to blame it for *Green Day: Rock Band* and a wardrobe full of cumbersome plastic toy instruments that we paid £100 each for in moments of madness, it also blazed the trail for true rhythm-action games like *Ouendan*, *Rhythm Tengoku* and *Dance Dance Revolution*. Gaming doesn't have to be about hulking space marines. You've just gotta believe.

★ THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT

FROM PC RPG wannabe to console conquering epic, Geralt's adventures have gotten progressively more impressive over the years and his last was not only the best of the bunch, but one of the greatest RPGs we've ever played. The depth of gameplay possibilities, with precision combat, crafting, hundreds of side quests and ways to kill time. It's one of the richest game worlds you can interact with.

There's a wicked sense of dark, macabre humour about it too. Geralt is a sardonic, often sarcastic and biting anti-hero who can act as the one sane soul in a world of madness or a playful puppet-master.

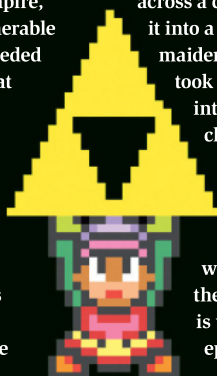


★ SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

FEW GAMES ARE bold enough to place you in the role of the bad guy, but, deliberately or not, that's just what Fumito Ueda did. *Colossus*'s magnificent creatures – part mountain, part living being, part work of art – are peaceful entities, indifferent to Wanda's presence until he attacks. They're the only things of beauty in an otherwise empty, disquieting expanse, and you're removing them from it. Watching these immense beasts crash to the earth is no moment of victory, then; it's a moment of loss and passing. It's so rare that a videogame can provoke such poignant and tender emotions, even more so without a single uttered word.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

IN THE MANY years since the third *Zelda* game was released, the videogames industry has evolved from an emerging medium into a global multibillion-pound empire, but, despite the innumerable games that have proceeded it, there's one thing that remains clear: *A Link To The Past* is still one of the most relevant examples of exemplary game design today. Indeed, the adventure that Miyamoto and his team crafted onto a humble SNES cartridge



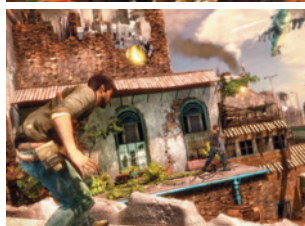
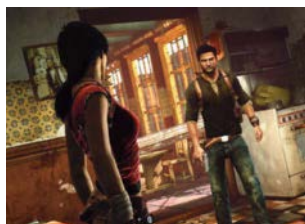
is nothing short of tangible magic, and a lasting testament to what dedication and passion can accomplish. So whether it was the first time you Hookshot across a chasm, Pegasus Booted it into a tree, led a suspicious maiden into the sunlight or took your first bunny-steps into the Dark World, it's clear that Link's first Master Sword quest is one that many cherish for good reasons, and, even when rated alongside the entire lineage, this is truly a legend among epic legends.





★ SPACE INVADERS

THE GRANDDADDY OF the shoot-'em-up may feel long in the tooth now, but its impact on the games industry can't be underestimated. So popular on release it caused a national Yen shortage in Japan, it has steadily evolved over the last three decades to spawn the sublime *Infinity Gene* and *Space Invaders Extreme*.



★ UNCHARTED 2: AMONG THIEVES

WE'RE QUICK TO criticize games that lean heavily on the language of cinema, but when it's done with the expertise of Naughty Dog, we're willing to let it slide. *Uncharted 2* thrives on its roots in the matinees of the Thirties and Forties, crafting a thrilling roller-coaster ride that manages to make its cutscenes a reward rather than a crutch on which to transition levels. They're also part of the rhythmic flow which *Uncharted 2* nails perfectly. Platforming, shooting, dialogue; there's a metrical tempo to *Uncharted 2*'s shifts in tone that few games manage to get so right. It would hardly work if it weren't for Drake, though. He's not driving the game's events; he's struggling to keep up. Just like the player, he's in it for the ride.



MINECRAFT

★ MOJANG'S SANDBOX SURVIVAL and crafting experience has been an industry changer. There's no underselling the seismic impact it has had on gaming, not just through its sales and popularity with a new generation of gamers, but in the way it introduced gamers to the broader concepts of construction gameplay.

The simple fun of *Minecraft* is in discovery thanks to randomly generated worlds and a constant stream of new content; there is always some new way to experience *Minecraft* or some new item to go chasing after. The thrill of finding your first dungeon or even small cluster of diamonds cannot be matched. Resources are scarce, enemies terrifying and it's all presented in such an easily approachable style that its depth is neatly disguised.

“The simple fun of Minecraft is in discovery thanks to randomly generated worlds and a constant stream of new content; there is always some new way to experience Minecraft or some new item to go chasing after”



SUPER METROID

★ THERE ARE SEVERAL games on this list whose skilful blending of art and design deliver some of the most atmospheric environments we've ever explored – the dreamlike stillness of *Silent Hill 2* being a prime example. Yet *Super Metroid*'s distant, lonely world is an even greater achievement, as it establishes an aura of remoteness without the aid of polygons or advanced lighting techniques. On a 2D plane, Yoshio Sakamoto managed to create a world not just ingeniously structured, but with a greater sense of place and solitude than any other game on the SNES, and perhaps greater than many games of even the Wii generation.

★ METAL SLUG

ITS GAMEPLAY MIGHT suggest it to be the most straightforward empty-headed jumping and shooting imaginable, but *Metal Slug* stood out in arcades for a reason it's rarely given credit for – its hugely impressive emotional depth. The gorgeous 2D pixel graphics gave it visual depth, character and expression at a time when most coin-ops were made up of cold, blank polygons, and the designers took full advantage, bestowing comedy, pathos, bathos and empathy on its various protagonists. That would have counted for nothing had it not also been a joy to play, but fortunately it was, so players had every motivation to battle through to the oddly moving 'PEACE FOREVER!' end sequence, as well as the many sequels to have followed it.



★ COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT

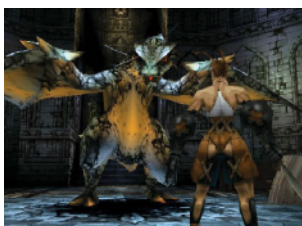
WHEN *RED ALERT* was released in 1996, it took specced-up Windows 95 PC owners by storm, as not only did its high-resolution and troop animations look fantastic, but its introduction of stackable command, unit grouping and hotkey systems resulted in a game which would set the RTS benchmark for years.





★ SECRET OF MANA

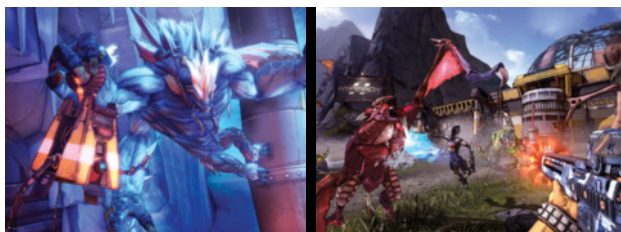
UNTIL *FINAL FANTASY VII* came along and made it a household name, Squaresoft was a virtually unknown developer in this part of the world. Only a handful of its games had been released in the UK but, thankfully, one of them was the rather brilliant *Secret Of Mana*. Taking the action gameplay already familiar to *Legend Of Zelda* players, it expanded upon the standard template with a levelling system that upgraded weapon attacks rather than the characters themselves, and included a hugely original three-player co-op option that has only recently been bettered by the likes of *Dragon Quest IX*. Our affection for this delightfully accessible SNES RPG is matched only by our dismay that the superior sequel, *Seiken Denetsu 3* is still to be localised nearly fifteen years later.



★ VAGRANT STORY

IT'S RARE FOR there to be a Square Enix RPG that didn't see several sequels follow, but *Vagrant Story* is one such anomaly. Released on the original PlayStation, it was a darker, more grown up role-playing experience than most, going deeper than even *Final Fantasy VII* in its overall tone. More interesting though is the semi real-time combat system called Battle Mode.

Similar to the modes used in *Parasite Eve* released a couple of years before, it's not unlike the VATS system in *Fallout 3*, pausing the action for a moment, showing you the body parts you can attack and then allowing you to select them. It was one of the first to master this system, and it remains fun to play now as it did on release.



BORDERLANDS 2

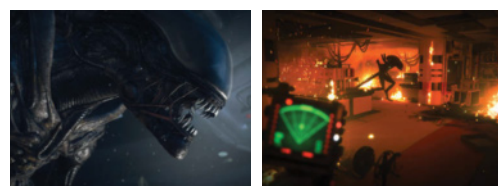
★ REMINDING US WHY it was that we used to love loot so much back in the day, *Borderlands* was a breath of fresh air when it landed in 2009, but *Borderlands 2* elevated that experience significantly, bringing stronger characters, more humour, even better balanced gunplay and more interesting missions to the table. As a co-op shooter experience, so long as you have loyal enough friends to stick with you for the entirety of its lengthy campaign, *Borderlands 2* is unmatched. The combat is tight, the weapons superb and often insane and the class balance superbly executed. And if you did find friends to share it with, it was not only hugely rewarding, but it kept on giving too.

“Borderlands was a breath of fresh air when it landed in 2009, but *Borderlands 2* elevated that experience significantly”



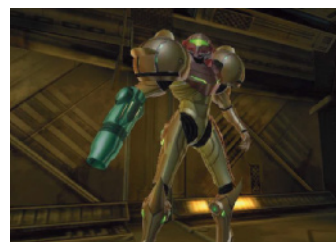
F-ZERO

★ FUTURISTIC RACING IS taken for granted these days, but when Mode 7 was all the rage and *Mario Kart* was just an apple in Miyamoto's eye, the SNES had *F-Zero*. The key here was speed, with sci-fi hovercars hurtling down tracks at 1000s of kph. The precursor to *WipEout*, *Extreme G*, et al.



ALIEN: ISOLATION

★ WE WOULDN'T HAVE guessed that Creative Assembly would be the studio to finally do an *Alien* game right, but that's what happened. Reaching back to the original Ridley Scott movie, it created survival horror leaning experience rather than marine focused FPS games we had seen before and it worked beautifully. One alien, one character to get to the end and a whole heap of ways to die. The horror experience of the generation and a template for things to come.



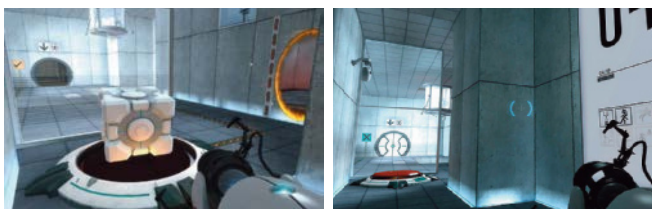
METROID PRIME

★ WHILE MOST MAGAZINES go many issues before reviewing a game, album or film that deserves a perfect ten, for *games™* the event came as early as our second issue with the revolutionary *Metroid Prime*.

Essentially what Retro Studios did was take a coveted Nintendo series which – bar a cameo in *Super Smash Bros.* – had skipped an entire console generation, and by a sheer stroke of genius rework the *Metroid* formula into

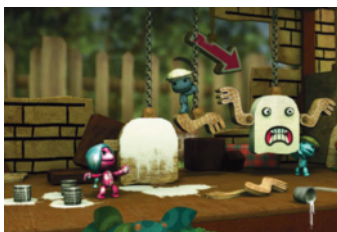
a first-person perspective that championed the exploration and lateral thinking of the originals. A boorish FPS this could've easily been, but Ridley and Samus Aran's makeover instead became the GameCube's first must-have.

PORTAL



★ THERE'S NO DENYING the genius of *Portal*. The head-breaking physics adapted by Valve from DigiPen's *Narbacular Drop*; the immaculately executed science fiction setting; the perfectly pitched dark comedy; and, of course, the challenges, which transcend the usual 'work out what I have to do, and do it' process involved in puzzle games to become something far more personal to each player. Playing through Valve's near-flawless puzzler is like conquering a degree-level mathematic theory. Proud and deluded, you're left feeling like you have achieved something nobody else in the world has ever done before – not even the people who designed it.

LITTLEBIGPLANET



★ THE THIRD PLACE. This Is Living. Play, Create, Share. How Sony's marketing has changed. Once we were sold PlayStations by confused-looking men in esoteric David Lynch commercials, now they're promoted through an ethic of group play and

smiling Sackboys. We've come a long way since *Crash Bandicoot*. And why not? *LittleBigPlanet* is arguably the greatest posterboy for a new future for gaming – a future where *everybody* can play; where the player's experience isn't set in stone, but is a toybox of infinite possibility; where the imagination of gamers on the other side of the world is just a click away. Play, Create, Share? *LittleBigPlanet*'s tagline is more than just a slogan; it's a new gaming revolution.

DARK SOULS



★ WE TEND TO spend a lot of time talking about difficulty and hardcore gamer experience with the *Souls* games, so it's easy to forget another key facet of *Dark Souls* that really helped to establish it as one of the greatest new RPGs around, and that's the unfolding nature of the story of Lordran and the depth of the game world. Great

bosses and controller-breaking levels of frustration may have filled the minutes, but the hours were filled with speculation about this world and what was really going on. There was a community guessing and sharing its thoughts on this strange and hostile world. Once you fall down that rabbit hole, *Dark Souls* has you for good.

CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

★ THE CASTLEVANIA GAMES on the NES don't transfer well to the modern era, and even the SNES game is painfully slow and dull to the average modern gamer. *Symphony Of The Night* rebooted the franchise to spectacular effect, splicing *Castlevania*'s vampire blood with jet fuel and tequila and introducing a wild-eyed sociopath into the family line. Both deeper and more immediate than its ancestors, *SOTN* doesn't so much



ooze atmosphere as gush it from the jugular vein. Subsequent games in the series – particularly the fantastic DS titles – did it better, but *Symphony Of The Night* let down the drawbridge.

“We had a lot of people telling us that this wouldn't work. I remember meeting one of the saleswomen at EA, and her saying 'I have to go to a Burnout meeting – what the fuck is a Burnout meeting?' because nobody knew what it was”

Alex Ward Creative director, Criterion Games



BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN

★ THE RECIPIENT OF one of *games™*'s first 10 out of 10 reviews, and still one of the most fierce and furious racing games available – hence our all-access Behind The Scenes feature on page 148. The addition of 'car combat' took *Burnout* into the mainstream, coupling unparalleled speed with raw aggression. Its sequels have never quite managed to match its intensity.



THE ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM

★ WITH EACH PASSING *Elder Scrolls* title, Bethesda makes things a little bit better. The lands become larger, the story more complex, the possibilities more numerous and the combat more refined. It's the extraordinary depth and detail of Tamriel that really shines in this game, building on an incredible lore and placing you within ancient conflicts and communities.

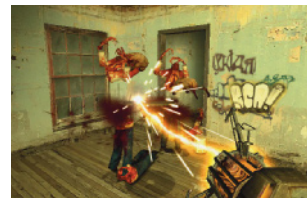
SUPER MONKEY BALL

★ **MONKEY BALL'S** BRILLIANCE is easy to dismiss. The name alone instantly commands ridicule, and in many ways so does the concept. Roll a monkey in a ball into a goal, remembering to pick up a few bananas. Like all the best ideas, though, it's the simplicity that proves its genius. It's the perfect counterpart to the GameCube's analogue stick – and the fact you tilt the level, not the simian, makes the momentum that bit trickier to pre-empt. It's one of the most frustrating games you'll ever play, but undoubtedly one of the most satisfying. And that's before you even get to Monkey Target.



HALF-LIFE 2

★ **HALF-LIFE 2 IS A** masterclass in design. There's the integration of gameplay elements with character development (consider the playful introduction of both Dog and the Gravity Gun). There's the constant shifting of backdrops, from the claustrophobic Ravenholm to the open beaches surrounding City 17. There's the character of Alyx – her comforting presence repeatedly stolen from the player at pivotal moments. There's Viktor Antonov's solemn architecture, or the way the player is quietly



prodded through levels by careful environmental design. There's the pairing of linear play with open, freeform battles. But Valve's greatest accomplishment? Bringing together its wealth of ideas with such skill that the seams are completely invisible.

“For everyone who worked on Half-Life 2, the project felt much more like a beginning than a destination. There are so many more opportunities for us as a creative team and for the industry as a medium that we have to explore”

Gabe Newell Co-founder and managing director, Valve

SILENT HILL 2



★ **SILENT HILL 2** succeeds because Team Silent knows that fear is greater for that which you can't see than that which you can. As such, the creatures of Silent Hill are often hidden, whether it's behind a curtain of fog or an obfuscatory camera angle. Also hidden are the motivations of the town's entranced NPCs, drifting like souls lost in purgatory without knowing it. But the most ingenious artifice? The reveal that the game is in fact a manifestation of James Sunderland's tortured mind. That *Silent Hill 2* concerns itself with anguish and pain rather than armed mutants makes it not just a terrifying game, but a poignant one too.

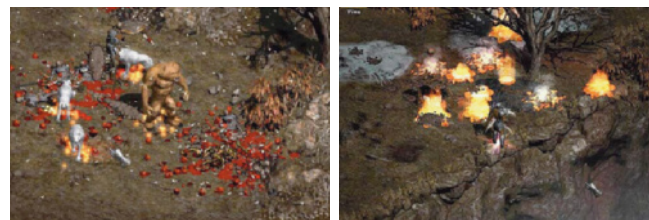
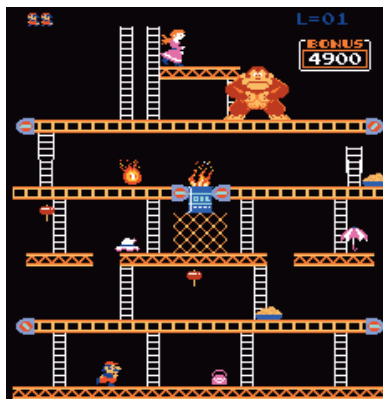
SUPER MARIO GALAXY



★ IT WAS ONE thing for Mario to leap from 2D into 3D on the N64, but this move to a wholly spherical series of environments with Wii controls seemed entirely more risky to us, and Nintendo pulled it off with aplomb. The fresh new take on gameplay that the planetoid levels offered meant *Galaxy* really felt like something new in the Mario universe. For the first time in the while a sense of wonder and expectation was renewed in the series as each new level brought genuine surprises as well as fan-pleasing references. One of many masterpieces in the *Mario* series, and unlikely to be the last we get to enjoy.

DONKEY KONG

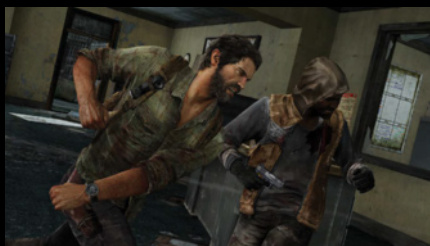
THIS WAS ONE of the first videogames to portray (and actually look and feel a bit like) an almost real-life situation. It doesn't take much of a leap of imagination to see yourself on Mario's building site, running and jumping across girders and ladders while a giant ape rolls flaming barrels at you. But hang on – isn't he supposed to be a plumber? It didn't really matter.



DIABLO II

CLICK CLICK CLICK click – sorry, was that our youth flying by? For all the simplicity of *Diablo II's* design – so refined over its predecessors, and yet so superficially similar – it's strange that no one has been able to recapture the magic of Blizzard's action-RPG genre-definer. Less strange, though, is why people are still playing it even as the third instalment (finally) approaches.





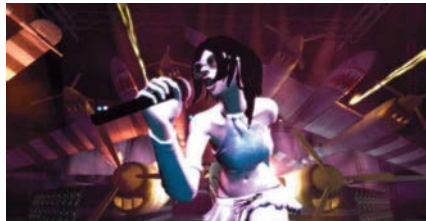
THE LAST OF US

NAUGHTY DOG HAS been gradually honing its craft from the days of *Crash Bandicoot* to deliver a perfect balance of story and action in its games. *Uncharted* was a big leap in that journey and *The Last Of Us* felt very much like its culmination, cementing the studio's well-deserved reputation for excellence.

As much as *The Last Of Us* is about surviving a zombie apocalypse, it's also about family and loyalty. It's a game as much about survival and resource management as it is about growing up and the importance of community. In a world broken we lead two equally

broken characters on a journey that sees them become a little more whole, even if it comes at a cost.

The relationship between Joel and Ellie is one of a kind. The adopted father and daughter relationship begins reluctantly and eventually becomes essential to each of them and watching that unfold is as gripping as any of the game's superb setpieces and shootouts. And once again the world Naughty Dog created is beautifully nuanced and dripping with untold potential. And the gameplay is equally excellent, combining survival and stealth in a wonderful way.



ROCK BAND 2

★ HARMONIX HAS TALKED about its pattern of innovation and perfection with its output. Just as *Guitar Hero II* refined the culture-defining original, so too *Rock Band II* takes the brilliance of the plastic-band and smooths off all the rough edges. Of course, it's the genre-creating brilliance of both *Rock Bands* that has won it entry into this list; a game that's as much about the love of music

as it is high scores and note charts. Suddenly, *Rock Band* parties became as prominent a part of Western society as a quiet drink in the pub. Gaming had turned mainstream in the most unusual way.

It's what's under the bonnet that makes *Rock Band 2* and its forebear such a success though. Harmonix's skill in recreating the feel of playing music through a plastic instrument is almost eerie.

This is never stronger than when behind the Fisher Price-looking drum kit, which is as much a learning tool as it is an input device.

Rock Band 2 really showed what can be done with DLC too, incorporating downloadable songs directly into the career mode, and making the *Rock Band* store as vital a component of the experience as four band members. A rock revolution.

“Sensible Soccer is the game that changed my life, and SWOS was the pinnacle of that series. A computer age Subutteo made relevant to anyone, anywhere in the world: that was my dream, and I am so happy we managed to fulfil it. To have three years as the undisputed world champions of football game-making was also priceless, and, what's more, I still have the trophies at home to prove it”

Jon Hare Co-designer, Sensible World Of Soccer

★ HEARTHSTONE

THERE'S A FINE balance between accessibility and easiness, and one that too many free-to-play games can't quite weigh up. *Hearthstone* can though, and that's what makes it great. It's like the retro games of old: easy to pick up, almost impossible to master. Some very simple and readable mechanics hide a much deeper (and much wealthier) game behind the curtain, one that's as appealing to RPG fans as it is to seasoned card players that are only in it 'for the meta'. Compounded with a fantastic, vibrant visual direction and some of the best PvP matchmaking in gaming, *Hearthstone* is a piece of incorruptible gaming genius.



★ SUPER MARIO KART

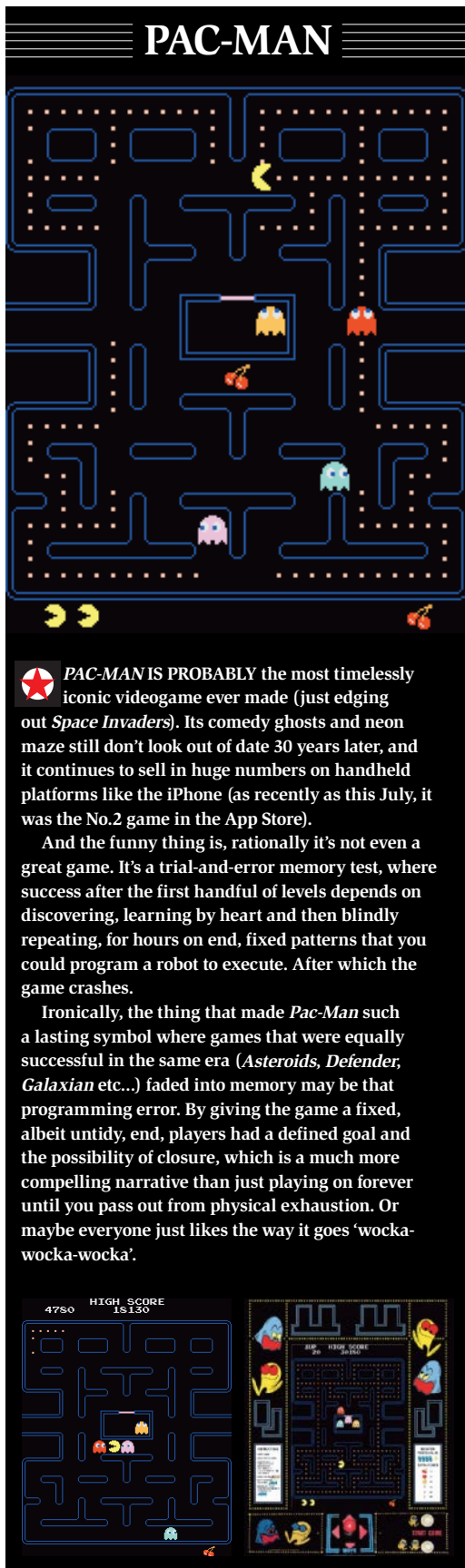
IT'S EASY TO forget how original *Super Mario Kart* was in its time. Yes, its rubber banding was shameless, and better iterations have been produced, but the original game beamed with the irreproducible magic only something unique can deliver. Avoiding the icy pools of Vanilla Lake; boosting through cocoa puddles on Choco Island; navigating Ghost Valley's drops – Mario had already defined one genre; with *Super Mario Kart* he invented another. Today, *Mario Kart* is lifestyle entertainment, sold to us by families with steering wheel peripherals in hand, but our defining memory will always be of late nights, close friends, and the iconic buzz of Lakitu's countdown signal.



★ SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER

THE LAST OF the great one-button football games. Nowadays you need to take a three-year degree course in Advanced Joypad Management if you want to get really good at *FIFA* or *PES*, and every time you get close to achieving it they bring out a new one and you have to start all over again. *SWOS* is the most intuitive, fast and joyful football game of all time, yet it's also incredibly comprehensive and deep, offering thousands and thousands of real teams and players from across the world. The dead hand of licensing means you literally couldn't make this game any more, and the dry spreadsheet aerobics of *Football Manager* are a poor substitute.

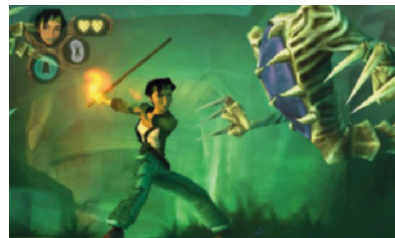
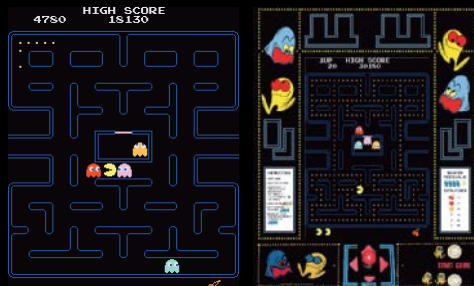




PAC-MAN IS PROBABLY the most timelessly iconic videogame ever made (just edging out *Space Invaders*). Its comedy ghosts and neon maze still don't look out of date 30 years later, and it continues to sell in huge numbers on handheld platforms like the iPhone (as recently as this July, it was the No.2 game in the App Store).

And the funny thing is, rationally it's not even a great game. It's a trial-and-error memory test, where success after the first handful of levels depends on discovering, learning by heart and then blindly repeating, for hours on end, fixed patterns that you could program a robot to execute. After which the game crashes.

Ironically, the thing that made *Pac-Man* such a lasting symbol where games that were equally successful in the same era (*Asteroids*, *Defender*, *Galaxian* etc...) faded into memory may be that programming error. By giving the game a fixed, albeit untidy, end, players had a defined goal and the possibility of closure, which is a much more compelling narrative than just playing on forever until you pass out from physical exhaustion. Or maybe everyone just likes the way it goes 'wokka-wocka-wocka'.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

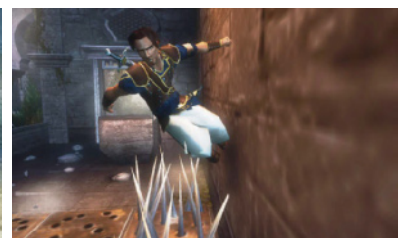
IS IT TOO much to call *Beyond Good & Evil* the French *Zelda*? Probably – it's too short and a little too unfocused to quite match up to Link's continued adventures, but the seeds are there. Michel Ancel's finest work is a mesmerising mixture of stealth, seafaring, puzzle-solving and nature photography, and one of the true greats of the PS2 era. Rarely does a game have this much character and charm, and the story to back it up; a sweeping, enthralling ride that's sadly over all too quickly, only because it leaves you gagging for more. A game that shoots for the stars – literally – and so nearly makes it.



ASSASSIN'S CREED: BROTHERHOOD

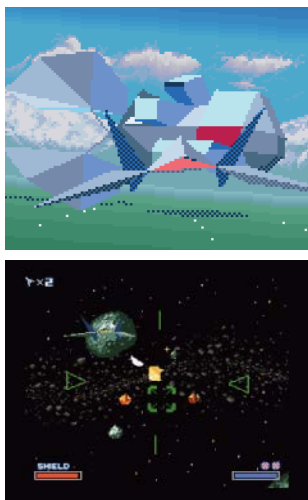
UBISOFT'S ORIGINAL CONCEPT for *Assassin's Creed* was stupendously ambitious, to the point that for us, it didn't really fully achieve its objectives until this third game, set in Rome. At this point the true freedom of a freerunning assassin became realised with deeper economic structures, more varied combat, more

options for how you managed your kills and generally a richer sense of the world around you. Building your own guild of assassins, sending them on missions and pursuing your own story gave the whole game a greater sense of place and purpose. For us it's the best of the bunch and incredibly good fun.



PRINCE OF PERSIA: SANDS OF TIME

SOMETIMES, A GAME comes along that just gets everything right. *Sands Of Time* is a perfectly pitched slice of entertainment, combining matinee values with bleeding edge ideas to create something quite breathtaking. The introduction of the time rewind mechanic was the best thing to happened to 3D platforming since *Super Mario 64*, and the way that every inch of the game's design and narrative tied into that mechanic made *Sands Of Time* such an unusually enriching experience. Ubisoft has never quite managed to recapture its magic, overcomplicating future *Princes* with anger and aggression. This royal son will always stand the test of time, however.



★ STARFOX

DESPITE BEING A debut showcase for Nintendo's spangly new SuperFX chip, *Starfox* avoided the pitfall of style over substance with a gameplay experience that was both compelling and challenging, as well as brimming with character thanks to its quartet of heroes. Piloting Fox's Arwing through the multiple paths scattered across the Lylat system required falcon-like reflexes and a peppy mentality. Yet the quality was anything but slippery.



★ WIPEOUT

ROUGHLY ONCE EVERY generation, videogaming stops being seen as a pastime for spotty, socially dysfunctional nerds and becomes briefly cool, before the pixies-and-dragons mob reassert their dominion and we're all knee-deep in Amazonian warrior women with enormous breasts and tiny bikinis fighting evil wizards. *Wipeout* marked one such moment. Happy days.



SHENMUE

★ YU SUZUKI'S ROLE-PLAYING classic has seen renewed interest, but it has been and perhaps always will be considered one of the greatest RPGs of recent memory. Its take on Japanese life in the Eighties was truly unique, offering interesting insights for western audiences as well as refreshing authenticity.

You must take a job at the docks, for instance, to gain the information you need, collect capsule toys and meet different NPCs depending on the time of day. Throw in the *Virtua Fighter* combat system, also developed under Suzuki, and you have an incredibly well-rounded experience. One of many reasons why the Dreamcast was a classic console too.

“Its take on Japanese life in the Eighties was truly unique”



OKAMI

★ AS A GAMING experience, *Okami* feels like it should be older than it actually is – not because it's archaic or lacking, but purely because its majesty has a timeless quality that begets its modest years. And just to put that into perspective, *Okami* was launched on the PS2 three months after the original *Gears of War*. Nonetheless, what Clover Studio achieved on the six-year-old architecture was nothing short of jaw-dropping, as Amaterasu's quest to return light to the world was a visual treat for both the mind and soul.

★ SYNDICATE

IN RETROSPECT, IT'S astonishing that *Syndicate* didn't provoke more controversy than it did. A game more or less solely dedicated to the pleasures of murdering pedestrians? One where you control a heartless corporation and wage open-ended tactical war in the street with your market rivals? Where the only goal is to slaughter your way to the top? Oh, well: even if it didn't get the Lieberman of the world into a frenzy, it's still regarded as one of Bullfrog's masterpieces, and with very good reason: the level of tactical depth on offer, in combination with the sheer sociopathic pleasure, was magnetic.

